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## BOOK REVIEWS

IN APRIL ONCE. By William Alexander Percy. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1920. Pp. 134.

THE CAPTIVE LION, AND OTHER POEMS. By William Henry Davies. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1921. Pp. 99.

SONGS FOR PARENTS. By John Farrar. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1921. Pp. 52.

THE JOURNEY. By Gerald Gould. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1921. Pp. 96.

THE PIER GLASS. By Robert Graves. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1921. Pp. 63.

POEMS. By Arthur S. Bourinot. Toronto: The T. H. Best Company. 1921. Pp. 47.

It is dangerous to write too definitely about that fluid thing we call poetry. How many treatises have left us, how many will leave us, if critically informed, still personally unsatisfied! "Poetry speaks for the more obscure and more silent forces within us."

Poetry is an idea or an emotion expressed with such exceptional beauty or power that the style becomes an indispensable part of the content. Is it that, simply? Or must we say, perhaps more arbitrarily, that poetry is the expressional fusion of thought, imagination, music and feeling (emotion, passion)? Critics will continue their prime and no doubt progressive task of analyzing poetry, but only the poets can show us, not tell us, what poetry is. And although the poet turned critic will bring to that rôle both dignity and sympathy, he will also too often bring a disproportionate emphasis upon the plus and minus values of his own experiments, for every poet must have not only a philosophy of life, but some theory of verse; every poet is partly creative seer, partly tentative and curious experimenter. Now he will write exercises in implicit defence of his theories, and now authentic responses in the liturgy of beauty.

Mr. Percy's *In April Once* is a little lyric play interpreting, with moments of rare beauty, the soul of young Guido, of thir-

teenth-century Sicily. Guido is held prisoner by the Florentines, for no evil cause. His jailer is David, once a shepherd lad and a Child Crusader, who has lost faith in the good purposes of God. The two young men, the one exultant despite his loss of liberty, the other gloomy although a free agent, sound each other in the kinship and converse of their common youth. In dungeons below Guido's bright room are many "thieves, politicians, murderers" who never see the sun. Two prisoners have been there for many years—Hugo, a red-bearded, boastful pirate, and Serle de Lanlarazon, a leprous heretic. At Guido's suggestion they are brought out to the parapet, and the ensuing conversation strikes through personal history and religious discussion into tragic issues. Mr. Percy has good dramatic instinct, as De Lanlarazon's appeal to Guido to forego his Hellenism for sterner thoughts and deeds testifies. The words, at first austere, mellow into a kind yearning as the old man gazes upon the ardent boy, and then again rise into a memorable vision of youth made earnest by the revealing power of the divine in life. Guido's defensive rejoinder is also finely wrought. Less successful is the reply to Guido's earlier question:—

"Who art thou, strange and terrible old man?"

It, too, is finely eloquent, but hardly eloquent enough for the moment, while the triple iterations at the close of David's tale to Guido (p. 39) are emotionally deviceful rather than genuinely effective. Mr. Percy's character-building is capably done, his humor is refreshing, and the beauty of many of his lyric lines is pure and spontaneous. We would quote especially:—

"Jailer, the very spring hath need of me."

"But one in whom the breath of God has not yet cooled."

"Perhaps a summer night scattered with stars."

"You've seen, David, some arch half hid in flowers  
That winds and butterflies and birds blow through."

"And suddenly all of the wood is shaken with trumpets and shouts  
And calls and commands and sounds of the battle affray."

The intercalary songs, too, are of delicate and gracious workmanship. The effect of *In April Once*, as a whole, is atmospherically convincing, the dénouement is true to the impelling

motive, and the thought-conflicts make for wisdom and for faith. In the remainder of the present collection we find outstanding such honest, comely work as *The Immortal Residue*, *Overtones*, *The Wood* (Spenserian and Keatsian in its quality), *Lullaby*, *To Butterfly*, *A Volunteer's Grave*, *The Squire*, and *An Epistle from Corinth*. The questionable iterations mentioned above rather spoil the otherwise fine poem *Autumnal*, and we note with some surprise that in rhymeless *Euripides* the sixth and seventh lines are permitted an accidental rhyme, and that in *The Wanderer* (of which the penultimate stanza is unusually lovely) the 'a' and 'b' rhymes of the fifth stanza employ identical vowels. But these are minor defects in a volume containing so much work of decided excellence.

Mr. Percy's *Agricolæ* carries over something of the spirit of Mr. Davies's poetry. This English poet's favorite themes are animals, birds, butterflies, love and the experience of wonder. He presents in his writing a rarely attractive union of child-likeness and whimsicality, of quick simple affection and odd-angled wisdom. If there is something of Wordsworth at work in his purely pastoral descriptions, there is a touch also of the mysticism of Blake. He writes with a plainness that is at once rustic and refined, but when he revises his work it tends to become 'considered' and to lose power. Compare, in this regard, *A Child's Pet*. His is a manly, healthful voice in the contemporary chorus, and he has power to make us feel the "good, gigantic smile o' the brown old earth". The present volume contains some eighty little poems, notable among which are the title-poem, *Love Speechless*, *The Cat*, *To-Day*, *How Kind Is Sleep*, *When Leaves Begin*, *The Coming Of Spring*, *A Song*, *A Bird's Anger*, *When Autumn's Fruit*, *Comfort*, *Let Me Confess*, *The Song of Life*, *Birds* and *England*.

Does anyone know what children really are, what they really think and hope and feel? Perhaps Kenneth Grahame's chapter on *The Olympians* in *The Golden Age* comes pretty close to showing us children's opinions of their elders. Mr. Farrar, the editor of *The Bookman*, in his slender volume, contrives very deftly to forget adult Olympianism and to restore himself, for

odd, happy moments at least, to the child point of view. There is little sophistication in any of these happy verses of longing and circumstance and the out-of-door world, and a great deal of boy and girl artlessness; and there is poetry of a naïve and winning simplicity.

Gerald Gould's *The Journey* reviews in a spirit of sad sincerity the changes and astonishments, the perplexities, the shifting shapes of an intimate love experience. The sequence of fifty Petrarchan sonnets, in point of dignity of tone and felicity of phrase, is not unworthy of comparison with Rossetti's *The House of Life*, or with Masefield's philosophic sonnets. That there is less insight here than there is true, yet among contemporary work, these sonnets, reinforced by the odes that precede them, stand out with rare distinction. It is significant of his mood that Mr. Gould allows the prison metaphor to recur often in his work. In all of it there is a stoic scorn of futile selfhood never wholly consoled by the love of love and of beauty. The workmanship is, for the most part, conscientiously fine and finished rather than generously spendthrift. If Mr. Gould's poetry is rhetorical, it is nobly and powerfully rhetorical. He is extraordinarily successful in his collocations of nouns or of adjectives, and his varieties in sestet-building show how thoroughly he has made his own the genius of the sonnet, save for occasional undesirable assonance in supposedly contrasting rhymes. The seventh ode suggests a detailed comparison with Lanier's treatment of musical instruments in *The Symphony*. We may quote a few of the verses we have most admired in Mr. Gould's book:—

“Lo, what a bubbling music lifts the wings  
Of the delighted lark.”

“The rare and dangerous excellence of song.”

“Has set the stars asunder from the stars,  
With only space and silence blown between.”

“ . . . . . shake the bells  
To clamour in unconquered citadels.”

“ . . . . . the rainy brilliant wind.”

“Myself half gaoler and half prisoner.”

“Arches and avenues of flaming day.”

“And not to ask for peace is to have peace.”

The Great War evoked from among the work of its poets militant the quaintly sturdy verse of Robert Graves. He has a quality all his own, writing very often in a rapid staccato that abruptly, almost jerkily hinting at its meaning, passes on,—a poetic shorthand vigorous and friendly, but disdaining illusive embroidery. In the little book *The Pier-Glass*, despite the strange power of the poem of that name, the really unforgettable pieces are four,—*The Magical Picture*, *The Gnat*, *Kit Logan* and *Lady Helen*, and *Black Horse Lane*. “A gay, charming soul”, says John Masfield of Graves, “buoyant and courageous.”

Most of the verses contained in Mr. Bourinot's collection touch war thoughts and experiences. The young Canadian aviator was shot down over the German lines, and wrote several of these solacing exercises while in the prison camps. Although their execution betrays the uncertain amateur at every turn, they have at least the promise belonging to sincerity and the interest attaching to the circumstances of their composition.

G. H. C.

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THE LIFTED CUP. By Jessie B. Rittenhouse. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 1921. Pp. 57.

Miss Rittenhouse's poems are neither sufficiently incomprehensible nor sufficiently lawless to inspire admiration in anyone who really keeps abreast of modern poetic theories. To the reader who still cherishes the delusion that the fundamental qualities of good poetry have not changed, the forty-four short lyrics in this volume will afford genuine pleasure. Their keynote is simplicity—in form, diction, and material. It is not the sympathy of pseudo-naturalism, however, such as that of Wordsworth at his worst, but the simplicity of perfect good taste, of *ars artem celare*. They are more in the line of descent from Herrick than from any other well-known English poet. There is not a trite expression, a false quantity, strained rhyme, or a line of *vers libre* in the volume. The poems are all subjective. They often lack substance and, generally, lack strength. They will not arouse any very strong emotions in the reader—Miss Rittenhouse is simply not that kind of poet—but they have a true power of suggesting emotion that is tempered and restrained and they